

Associated Students

MONTANA TECH OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

January 23, 2007

Members of the Joint Appropriations
Subcommittee on Education:

I am submitting this testimony in support of the tuition cap.

When I purchased books my first semester of college my dad mumbled that they cost nearly as much as his tuition had. I understood that since his time in college, costs had gone up, and inflation had taken effect, but the striking difference between my tuition costs and his was amazing to me.

I enquired further and was surprised to find that he had left college with nearly no debt, but he had had to work three jobs to do it. My mom, like my dad, had also left nearly debt free. The circumstances with which my dad left college were surprising to me as well. At the beginning of his final semester he was told he had only to complete a few required electives to graduate. But, after working hard for three and a half years, taking heavy credit loads and working several jobs, he found it hard to justify paying for classes that weren't pertinent to his major. He dropped out, with the intent of coming back when he had more time and more money. He often told me that was one of his worst decisions, as he could never find the time, and with costs continuing to balloon, found himself settled before he had enough money to return.

My parents both worked hard in school, and both realized the value of education. They planned well in advance for my education, and I was fortunate enough to qualify for several scholarships which dramatically reduced the costs of school, and the burden on me and my family. I attend classes because I want to, and I work because I want to. The money I earn is not pre-allocated to my education; I get to enjoy the fruits of my labor.

However, many of my peers are not so lucky. At the beginning of this semester a good friend of mine mentioned that she was facing the prospect of dropping out of school unless she could convince her boyfriend to help her pay for it. She already works harder than I do, is quite smart, and is well on her way to a nursing degree, but she may have to leave her dreams behind under the crushing burden of student loans.

I have many friends in the same situation. Most are determined to make it by working their way through, many times at the cost of their GPA. Others continue to accumulate enough debt that they are forced to search for jobs out of state simply because they cannot find good enough salaries or positions here. The cost of our education, as much as the lack of jobs, is driving our qualified, well educated citizens to leave for other pastures.

Any attempt to lower or cap the cost will not only be an incentive for students to stay in state for college, but it would also be of significant benefit to all students currently attending Montana schools. I urge you all to give this your most careful consideration, and vote to cap the amount of money my peers and I will have to spend just to stay enrolled.

Thank you,



Steven J. Olig

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